

The mullahs say their forefathers were Christians, but were conquered by a great Mussulman general, Hodja Mussaii Ashari, who came over the Mura Pass from Hissar a thousand years ago.

There are comparatively few abandoned culture-mounds in the mountain valley, but many of its oases appear to lie on a considerable thickness of accumulated débris; in other words, most of the village sites of antiquity there are still occupied, whereas most of those on the plains have been abandoned. This difference is a good illustration of the characteristic distinctions of high-valley oases, type III, especially the difference of water-supply and degree of exposure to hostile people. Towns on the plains were from time to time abandoned for lack of water

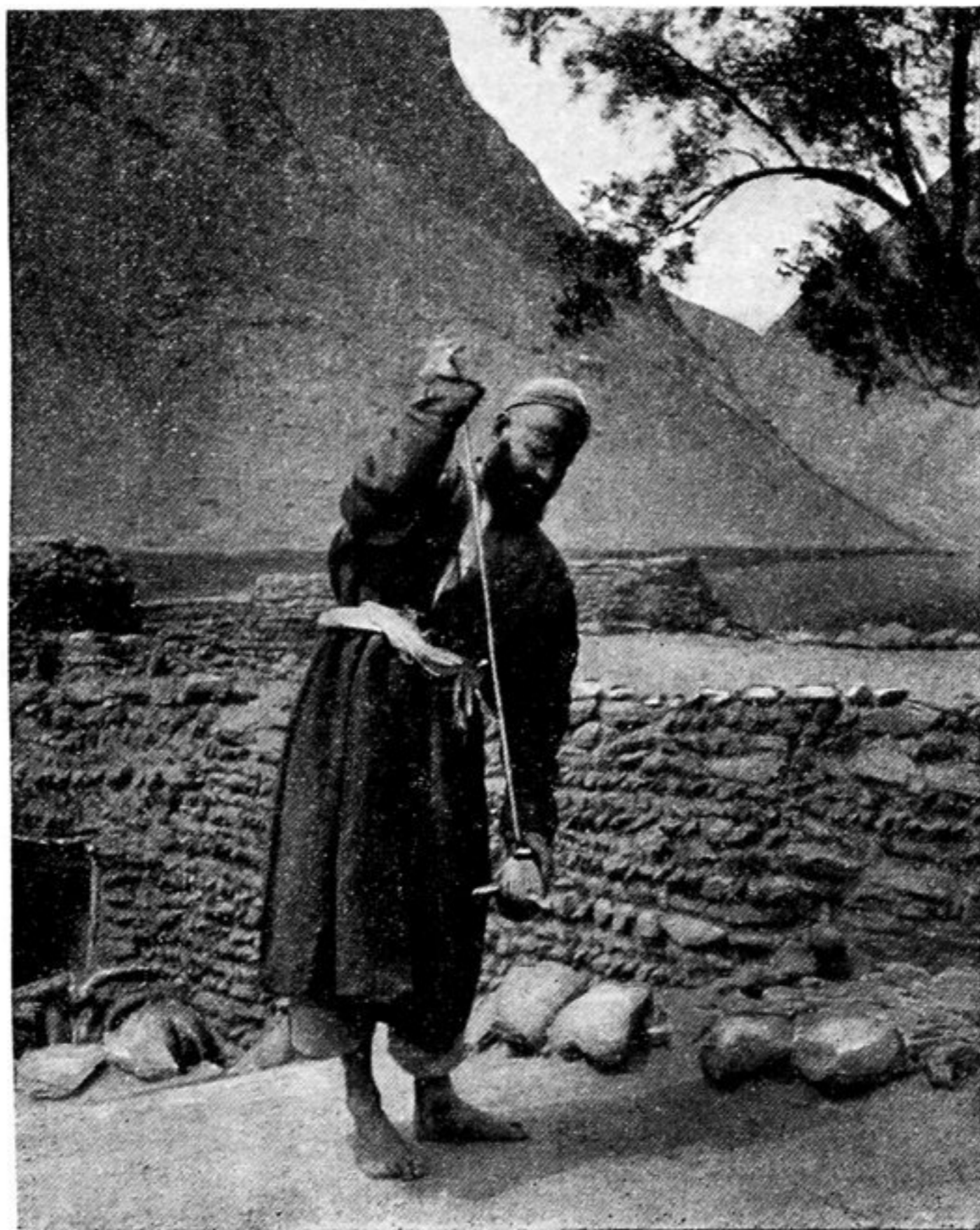


Fig. 477.—Zerafshan Galcha Spinning at Yarum.

as their distributary streams contracted because of a general progressive desiccation of Central Asia, and others were destroyed by armies that plundered and passed on, leaving their ruins to the desert. Still others may have lost their water to pirating canals of other oases. Most of the oases of the high valley have always had an excess of water-supply, their size being limited by topography only, and their inaccessibility has always been a protection against invasion; one man can guard a trail in the Zerafshan.

In many of the towns débris of occupation has accumulated in the form of terraces, in successive steps from 4 to 6 feet high, down slopes of the old alluvial terraces and doubtless extending to a depth of several feet below. The thickness varies from town to town, according to the amount of sediments in the waters drawn upon for irrigation, the proportion of stone used in construction, and the time of occupation. The few abandoned sites observed are in positions relatively more exposed to neighboring oases and intersecting routes. Their positions were evidently chosen as the easiest to fortify in their neighborhoods, and, in some cases, seem to have been abandoned for other points nearby that are agriculturally more advantageous. Of abandoned villages there are three of especial interest: One at Iori, one at Urmitan, and one at Kadushar (figs. 481-483).

Iori Kurgan (fig. 481) is an old citadel, about 100 feet by 200 feet long, running north and south and resting on gypsum beds rising from the eastern edge of a